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# FIRST PERSON

## Internships Open Doors To Recovery

**Connecting young Liberians and businesses boosts spirits as well as know-how for rebuilding a country**



Photo: Deuce Greenfield

Freeman B. Woahloe, Jr., electrical engineer, Liberia.

***“I saw a chance to come home and help rebuild my country, especially after being away so long,” said Freeman B. Woahloe, Jr.***

Freeman B. Woahloe, Jr. spent 14 years in exile in Ghana – the entire length of the Liberian civil conflict, waiting for an opportunity to come back home and be among his people. After the historic election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Freeman found his opportunity.

“I saw a chance to come home and help rebuild my country, especially after being away so long and seeing other African countries flourish,” Woahloe said. “I wanted to help Liberia do the same.”

His enthusiasm soon diminished after witnessing the lack of job opportunities available in post-war Liberia. Despite having a degree in electrical engineering from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, he still found it difficult to find employment. He was filling out application after application and was told that he did not have enough experience.

“There was no hope, I began to get discouraged and thought about going back to Ghana,” said Woahloe.

Then an ad in a local newspaper provided Woahloe with some hope. The ad was for USAID Liberia’s Private Sector Internship Program. The workforce development program is designed to help Liberians from ages 18 to 35 gain meaningful professional experience in the private sector and guide them in their search for employment. Woahloe applied for the program and was accepted as an electrician.

He was selected as an intern to work as part of another USAID program with the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) to rebuild the electric power grid for Monrovia, Liberia’s capital. After completing three months of training, Woahloe was offered full-time employment with LEC as a construction supervisor.

Since 2007, USAID Liberia’s Private Sector Intern program has sponsored 470 interns and created employment for 110 young Liberians involving more than 40 enterprises and organizations. Based on lessons learned from the program, USAID is developing new programs in youth training and employment to engage a large and idle young population that is potentially destabilizing in the rebuilding of their country.